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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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HQ USAF FOR X0XX
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Israeli Elections

[1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu told an audience of new immigrants in Tel Aviv: QIf you vote for another party, the Likud will be weakened, but if you vote for Likud, I will

be prime minister and make Lieberman an important minister in my cabinet and build a strong government.Q Yediot quoted a senior official in Yisrael Beiteinu's campaign HQ as saying that Lieberman is interested in the defense portfolio in a Netanyahu cabinet. Media quoted FM and Kadima chair Tzipi Livni as saying that if Kadima emerges as the largest party in the elections, it will ask President Shimon Peres to charge it with forming a government, even if the right-wing block is larger. Maariv and Israel Radio reported that Kadima might strive for a rotational form of government with Likud. HaQaretz quoted DM and Labor Party Chairman Ehud Barak as saying yesterday: QLieberman is not my cup of tea, but we will not sit in any government whose guidelines are not compatible with our positions.Q Major media reported that Barak told the Rabin camp Q a group that has monitored every election since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin Q- that Labor is carrying on his tradition.

Israel Radio quoted Salah Bardawil, a member of the Hamas delegation in Cairo, as saying that an 18-month truce agreement has been drafted. It is said to include the opening of the Israel-Gaza crossings, but not of the Egypt-Gaza ones. (Media cited Hamas's dissatisfaction over Israel's stated willingness to open only 75% of the crossings.) HaQaretz quoted Egypt as saying that a truce agreement will not be reached in coming days. On the other hand, Maariv reported that Egypt announced last night that it hopes for a breakthrough in the coming days.

Yediot bannered Israel's domestic deficit, as tax collection dropped by 16% in January.

The media reported that yesterday Hamas men in Gaza stole blankets and food from UNRWA at gunpoint. Media reported that UN officials condemned the theft. The Jerusalem Post quoted Welfare and Social Services Minister Isaac Herzog, who oversees humanitarian aid to Gaza, as saying that the theft from UNRWA was Qfurther proof that Hamas is continuing to make life miserable for the population of Gaza and will use any means to intensify its suffering.

Leading media reported that yesterday the IDF acknowledged that on January 16 two Israeli tanks mistakenly shelled the house of Dr. Abu al-Aysh in Gaza. The physician, who had worked in Israel, lost three daughters in the incident.

HaQaretz reported that French President Nicolas Sarkozy told President Obama this week that he wants to convene an international peace conference in Paris this spring, after the new Israeli government stabilizes.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Peace Now as saying that the Defense Ministry is poised to authorize one of the largest West Bank construction projects in recent years -- 1,400 apartments in the Adam settlement located just north of Jerusalem. DM Barak's spokesman dismissed Peace Now's claim as Qnonsense.

HaQaretz quoted Palestinian doctors in Gaza as saying that the wounds of their burn victims seem to have been caused by white phosphorus bombs the IDF dropped during its ground offensive, but that only lab tests will be able to confirm this. The Jerusalem Post reported that the International Federation of Journalists is seeking a probe of Israel's actions in Gaza. The Jerusalem Post also reported that human rights groups argued yesterday that a detailed probe into Hamas's firing of Qassam rockets at Israeli communities is not necessary, because it constitutes such a QblatantQ war crime. By contrast, Israel's actions are more complex, and therefore do require such investigation.

Leading media cited Israel's hope that a meeting on weapons smuggling into Gaza that began in Copenhagen yesterday will result in increased cooperation and intelligence sharing among different navies that patrol the Gulf of Aden and the Mediterranean Sea. Yediot reported that retired Greek-Catholic Archbishop Hilarion Capucci, whom Israel accused in the 70s of arms trafficking for the Palestine Liberation Army, is on board a Lebanese ship trying to break the siege on Gaza. Electronic media reported that today the crew of an Israel Navy vessel stopped and stormed the ship. The media quoted DM Barak as saying yesterday: QThe Iranian satellite is a technological achievement for the Iranians and a first step towards proving their military and intelligence capabilities. This is another reason for the international

community to tighten and increase sanctions against Iran." HaQaretz reported that the development worries the West, which is nonetheless trying out a conciliatory approach. HaQaretz quoted U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice as saying that she will hold direct contacts with Iran.

HaQaretz reported that self-exiled former Balad (National Democratic Assembly) leader Azmi Bishara is urging Israeli Arabs not to boycott the Knesset elections.

Media reported that yesterday, following increasing pressure from South Africa's Jewish community, the country's Deputy Foreign Minister, Fatima Hajaig apologized to the Republic's President for saying last month that "Jewish money controls America." Yediot, The Jerusalem Post, and Israel Radio reported that the South African dock workers union is preventing an Israeli ship from unloading cargo in the port of Durban.

Maariv reported that junior high schools, especially religious ones, ignore the official policy to teach Arabic. The Education Ministry is dissatisfied with this development.

Based on two election polls published today, the Likud currently enjoys a lead of 3-6 seats over Kadima, while Yisrael Beiteinu occupies the third slot, overtaking the Labor Party by a margin of 1-6 seats. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe presents the following figures: Likud 26, Kadima 23, Yisrael Beiteinu 19, and Labor Party 13. In Israel Hayom, conversely, the poll projects the following: Likud 30, Kadima 24, Yisrael Beiteinu 17 and Labor Party 16. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe interprets the results as cause for concern for Binyamin Netanyahu, but notes that the right wing camp enjoys a sizeable blocking majority. Israel Hayom, also based on an analysis of political blocs, pronounces that Netanyahu remains the leading candidate to form the next government.

1. Israeli Elections:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QIn a war of the type waged in Gaza it is not enough to express criticism post factum, as the leaders of Meretz are doing now.

Very liberal columnist Gideon Levy wrote in Ha'aretz: QNetanyahu's election will free Israel from the burden of deception.... Together with the world, we will see which direction we are facing and who we really are.

Veteran journalist and anchor Dan Margalit wrote in the independent Israel Hayom: QAt this time [Barak and Netanyahu] are the most constructive team that the Jewish people can present.

Former Meretz leader Dr. Yossi Beilin wrote in Israel Hayom: Q[A right-wing] coalition ... will find itself advancing the peace process.

Columnist Orit Shochat wrote in Ha'aretz: QWith the assistance of the U.S. administration, which is keen to find a [diplomatic] solution, and with the support of European leadership, Livni has more of a chance than did her predecessors to achieve results.

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QYesterday ... a new journalistic low was recorded. This happened in the article by Ari Shavit, QCautionary Note,Q which was published yesterday in HaQaretz.... QLivni finds it difficult to make decisions,Q [Shavit wrote].

Block Quotes:

1. "No Reason to Vote Meretz"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/5): QMeretz

suffered a total and resounding failure with its automatic support for the decision to go to war in Gaza.... The only right to existence of a party like Meretz is in its being a courageous and true alternative that gives voice to clear and precise positions. When this voice becomes blurred and turns into nothing more than a weak echo of the positions of the large parties in the center and on the left, its role becomes redundant. The voters of the left therefore have no reason to support a party whose positions are flaccid. In a war of the type waged in Gaza it is not enough to express criticism post factum, as the leaders of Meretz are doing now.

II. "Let Netanyahu Win"

Very liberal columnist Gideon Levy wrote in Ha'aretz (2/5):

QBenjamin Netanyahu will apparently be Israel's next prime minister.

There is, however, something encouraging about that fact.

Netanyahu's election will free Israel from the burden of deception: If he can establish a right-wing government, the veil will be lifted and the nation's true face revealed to its citizens and the rest of the world, including Arab countries. Together with the world, we will see which direction we are facing and who we really are. The masquerade that has gone on for several years will finally come to an end. Netanyahu's election is likely to bring the curtain down on the great fraud -- the best show in town -- the lie of QnegotiationsQ and the injustice of the Qpeace process.Q Israel consistently claimed these acts proved the nation was focused on peace and the end of the occupation. All the while, it did everything it could to further entrench the occupation and distance any chance of a potential agreement.

III. "Netanyahu and Barak: the Best Option for Israel "

Veteran journalist and anchor Dan Margalit wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (2/5): QOn Tuesday Kadima brought this weekQs good tidings. It said that Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak have already agreed to become partners in the next government. If Kadima had been known for its reliability, I would have applauded the fait accompli. This does not mean that Barak and Netanyahu can; that they are the best; that other parties or their own parties have people as worthy as they are. But at this time they are the most constructive team that the Jewish people can present.

IV. "After the Election: Right-Wing Coalition Will Advance the Peace Process"

Former Meretz leader Dr. Yossi Beilin wrote in Israel Hayom (2/5):

Q[In the past], the leaders of the right decided to take steps in the peace process only when they were without the fig leaf of the center and the left. It was then that they were simply exposed to the real world and understood that in order to protect certain national interests, one must compromise. Menachem Begin gave up a territory three times the size of Israel when he led a right-wing government that Labor refused to join. Shamir, who opposed an international peace conference as long as the Labor Party was in his government, led Israel to the Madrid Conference after Labor had left his government. Netanyahu, heading a right wing government, did indeed prevent a final status arrangement, but withdrew from Hebron and agreed to give up 13.1 percent of the West Bank as part of the Wye Agreement. And Sharon, leading a right wing government, left Gaza and explained this in terms of pressure from the left, the Geneva initiative and the Shin Bet directorsQ letter. If these four had headed a national unity government, it is doubtful that they would have taken these steps. If the leaders of Kadima and Labor are interested in seeing the peace process advance, it is their duty to say to Netanyahu: QNo!Q and to allow him to form a government with Shas and Lieberman, the Jewish Home, and the National Union. In the circumstances that will ensue, this is the coalition that will find itself advancing the peace process.

IV. QWhy Livni

Columnist Orit Shochat wrote in Ha'aretz (2/5): QTrue, Kadima is seen as an artificial party, a kind of refugee camp for those who left Likud, but it should not be forgotten that it broke away from Likud because of an ideological rift, and not for seats. Sharon's decision to divide the land and to evacuate settlers so as to make possible the continued existence of the Jewish state is just as

important now as it was then. There is no leader who relates to this need with greater seriousness than does Livni. That is why a vote for Kadima is not a compromise nor is it a gamble. With the assistance of the U.S. administration, which is keen to find a solution, and with the support of European leadership, Livni has more of a chance than did her predecessors to achieve results. Whoever has despaired of a two-state solution has also despaired of the existence of a Jewish state. Planes and bombs will not be able to save us from mistaken decisions.

VI. QJournalistic Low

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/5): QYesterday ... a new journalistic low was recorded. This happened in the article by Ari Shavit, QCautionary Note,Q which was published yesterday in HaQaretz.... QLivni finds it difficult to make decisions,Q [Shavit wrote]. Excuse me? Who delayed [IsraelQs] response, when many said that the delay only strengthened Hamas? ThatQs right, Ehud Barak. And who was revealed throughout the war as a person incapable of making a serious and unequivocal decision, either on a cease-fire or warfare? ThatQs right, it was ShavitQs friend. This ridiculous [writing] reaches the point of absurdity when Shavit writes that QLivni completely lacks emotional intelligence.Q This is truly a record. After all, if there is a person who is not only devoid of all emotional intelligence, but even bases his election campaign on the official lack of emotional intelligence, it is Ehud QIQm not a palQ Barak. Full disclosure: The writer of these lines is not a friend of any of the candidates, including Tzipi Livni. Livni has also been subjected, in the past months, to incisive critical articles penned by this writer. She will probably be subjected to such articles in the future as well.

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Liberal columnist Uzi Benziman wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QHow would the public in Israel have felt, if immediately after the Second Lebanon War, Hizbullah had invited children from northern Israel to spend time in its summer camps?

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QWe can still detach ourselves from the Egyptian coercion and adopt new international solutions in Gaza. It is still possible. But if the Golan should pass into Syrian hands, it would be irreversible.

Block Quotes:

1I. "Distorted Philanthropy"

Liberal columnist Uzi Benziman wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/5): QIsrael attacked Gaza because it felt that this was the means that remained for it to exercise its right to self-defense. The scale and nature of the military move, which severely harmed the Palestinian civilian population as well, were derived from operational considerations. This model of action will repeat itself, judging by the statements of the leadership in Jerusalem (Qdisproportionate responseQ) in the future too, if there is no quiet. Under these circumstances, Israel has no chance to convince [the Palestinians] of the purity of its intentions, when with one hand it pushes the buttons raining powerful bombs on Gaza, and with the other hand calls upon the suffering population to receive aid from it. It is naivet, not to say transparent sanctimoniousness, to believe that shell-shocked Palestinian children would seek healing for their distress among those who inflicted the troubles upon them. How would the public in Israel have felt, if immediately after the Second Lebanon War, Hizbullah had invited children from northern Israel to spend time in its summer camps? It is reasonable to assume that in the eyes of the Palestinian child, Israel appears as an F-16 jet sowing bereavement and destruction and not as a compassionate physician or a leisure

activities impresario.

II. "DonQt Volunteer"

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/5): QWe are on a collision course with Syria, and therefore we should make peace with it, which will of course include giving over the Golan Heights to Syrian hands -- this was the essence of the statements made by Director of the Political-Security Staff in the Defense Ministry Amos Gilad at the Herzliya Conference.

Why? Because if we reach a military confrontation with Syria, AssadQs regime may fall, and we will face an extreme Sunni coalition against us.... We can still detach ourselves from the Egyptian coercion and adopt new international solutions in Gaza. It is still possible. But if the Golan should pass into Syrian hands, it would be irreversible. The Syrians will settle a million citizens there, in order to create popular QresistanceQ from the Golan, which is now empty, and will then roll their eyes heavenwards saying that they cannot control the terror that will originate from there. The meaning of such a QpeaceQ with Syria is that we will have neither territory nor stability.

CUNNINGHAM